

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 2823

USICA FOR NEA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT
SUBJECT: TIGHTER SCREWS ON THE KUWAITI PRESS?

REF: (A) 76 KUWAIT 4159, (B) 76 KUWAIT 4143.

1. THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE KUWAIT COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IS STUDYING A NEW DRAFT PUBLICATION LAW PREPARED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION. THE CONTENTS OF THE DRAFT HAVE NOT YET BEEN MADE PUBLIC, BUT THERE IS GROWING SUSPICION HERE THAT THE LAW WILL FURTHER CURB PRESS FREEDOM. SINCE THE CURRENT LAW WAS MADE MORE RESTRICTIVE IN AUGUST 1976, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ACTED SIXTEEN TIMES TO SUSPEND TEMPORARILY PUBLICATION OF A DOZEN DIFFERENT DAILIES, WEEKLIES, AND MONTHLIES FOR PERIODS OF FROM THREE DAYS TO THREE MONTHS. (THE LATEST INSTANCE, INVOLVING SUSPENSION OF TWO WEEKLIES SPONSORED BY THE CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL REFORM SOCIETY, AN ISLAMIC GROUP, HAS BEEN REPORTED SEPARATELY TO USICA, COPY TO NEA/ARP). THE MOVE TO REWRITE THE PUBLICATION LAW APPARENTLY HAS BEEN UNDERWAY IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION FOR SOME MONTHS, BUT IT WAS NOT UNTIL MARCH THAT IT CAME TO PUBLIC NOTICE, AS PART OF A LIST OF KEY STATUTES TO BE REVISED.

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2. BOTH THE AMIR AND THE HEIR APPARENT/PRIMIN MET WITH A KUWAITI PRESS DELEGATION ON MAY 2 -- THE NEWLY ELECTED BOARD OF THE KUWAITI JOURNALISTS SOCIETY. PRESS AND OTHER REPORTS OF THESE MEETINGS INDICATE THAT THE DRAFT PUBLICATION LAW WAS DISCUSSED, AND THAT AMIR UNDERLINED THE DUTY OF THE PRESS TO BE "CONSTRUCTIVE" IN ITS

CRITICISM. A PRESS REPORT OF THE MEETING QUOTED THE AMIR AS CALLING FOR FREE AND OBJECTIVE TREATMENT OF NATIONAL PROBLEMS AND "GUIDANCE" FOR OFFICIALS AND CITIZENS. HEIR APPARENT/PRIMIN SHEKH SA'AD REPORTEDLY ASKED THE BOARD FOR PROPOSALS REGARDING THE DRAFT PUBLICATION LAW, BUT REPORTS ALSO INDICATE THAT HE DELIVERED A STERN AND FRANK LECTURE TO THE BOARD ON PRESS MISTAKES AND VIOLATIONS OF THE CURRENT PUBLICATIONS LAW.

3. COMMENT: WHILE MANY KUWAITIS OSTENSIBLY PRIDED THEIR RAMBUNCTIOUS PRESS (AS A FEATURE OF KUWAITI DEMOCRACY) PRIOR TO THE AUGUST 1976 IMPOSITION OF TIGHT RESTRICTIONS ON THE MEDIA, IN FACT KUWAITI PRESS FREEDOM NEVER HAD ENJOYED STRONG POLITICAL SUPPORT NOR LEGAL SAFEGUARDS. THUS, THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC OUTRAGE, THOUGH VARIOUS PUBLICATIONS HAVE BEEN TEMPORARILY SHUT DOWN. THERE HAS BEEN BITTERNESS, HOWEVER, ON THE PART OF THE PRESS AT THE SEEMINGLY CAPRICIOUS ENFORCEMENT OF THE REGULATIONS. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, THE OPERATION OF THE TOUGHER PRESS LAW HAS MADE EDITORS TIMID AND JOURNALISTS DISGUSTED -- NO ONE CAN BE SURE IN ADVANCE WHAT MAY BE SAFELY PUBLISHED. TIGHTER CONTROL, HOWEVER, IS APPARENTLY SOMETHING THAT THE KUWAITI MEDIA WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH.

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